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Letter dated 7 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Ahead of the preparation of your first report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2401 (2018), I have the honour to forward to you herewith information on violations of the resolution by terrorist and illegal armed groups in Syria on 6 and 7 March 2018 (see annex I), as well as a report on the delivery of humanitarian aid to Duma on 5 March 2018 (see annex II).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annexes circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Vassily **Nebenzia**

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Annex I to the letter dated 7 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

6 March 2018. Jabhat al-Nusra militants and allied armed groups in eastern Ghutah launched rocket and mortar strikes on the Damascus districts of Bab Tuma, the area of Abbasiyin Square and Assad suburb. The Damascus Police Hospital and Ibn Sina Hospital in Adra were also damaged by the shelling. Fifteen civilians were injured.

Local illegal armed groups in the Homs de-escalation zone provoked clashes with the Syrian Army near Javalik, Mahattah, Sanisal and Tayr Ma'lah.

A hospital in Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, in the Idlib de-escalation zone, ceased operations for security reasons because of a conflict between Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, led by Jabhat al-Nusra, and the jihadist alliance The Syrian Liberation Front. There is a threat of closure of other local health facilities because of security concerns.

Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists shelled Fu'ah and Kafraya enclaves, north of Idlib, with mortars, killing several civilians.

Information on the activities of illegal armed groups in the eastern Ghutah de-escalation zone undermining the implementation of Security Council resolution 2401 (2018) (as at 6 March 2018, 9 a.m. Moscow time)

1. Illegal armed groups repeatedly shelled residential districts along the perimeter of the eastern Ghutah de-escalation zone with mortars. In a 24-hour period there were more than 20 120-mm shell blasts, injuring several people and causing significant material damage. Seven civilians were wounded as a result of the shelling of the Tishrin Hospital in the northern part of Damascus. Snipers of the illegal armed groups were active along the border of the area. Jihadists opened fire against people attempting to leave the area.

2. Retreating militants forced local civilians to follow them. Jihadists set up weapon emplacements in residential buildings, placing civilians there as human shields. They imposed a curfew during the humanitarian pause on the territory under their control, with the aim of not allowing people to exit. Public gatherings are banned. It is demanded that people stay during sermons in the mosques.

Information on the activities of illegal armed groups in the eastern Ghutah de-escalation zone undermining the implementation of Security Council resolution 2401 (2018) (as at 7 March 2018, 9 a.m. Moscow time)

1. In the eastern Ghutah de-escalation zone, Jabhat al-Nusra militants opened fire with mortars and small weapons on the humanitarian corridor, once again preventing the exit of civilians from the zone of military operations. The most intensive fire was launched on the western part of Rayhanin, in immediate proximity to the medical post for evacuees.

Jaramana and the district of Bab Tuma also came under mortar fire. Tishrin Hospital in the Dweir al-Balad block was hit. More than 20 120-mm shells were launched, injuring some 20 people, many of whom remain in a critical condition. Snipers of illegal armed groups were active along the border of the de-escalation zone. The primary targets were civilians trying to leave the zone.

In their positions in Harasta al-Basal and Shaffuniyah (eastern Ghutah, 8 km and 14 km north-east of Damascus, respectively), the Syrian Army had no fewer than 20 mortal casualties.

2. Jaysh al-Islam militants intensified a propaganda campaign in social networks, highlighting their successes in clashes with the Syrian Army in the eastern Ghutah de-escalation zone, boasting of recapturing some previously lost villages and of significant losses in the Syrian Army. To prevent the exit of civilians from the de-escalation zone, extremists search residential areas and take the leaflets with which people can pass through the humanitarian corridor.

3. Leaders of the terrorist groups in the eastern Ghutah de-escalation zone stated that there would be no exit of Islamists, as in Aleppo in the winter of 2016. They stressed that eastern Ghutah is their land and that they have no intention of leaving it. That was their response to the initiative of the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in Syria offering security guarantees to militants who may decide to leave the de-escalation zone.

Annex II to the letter dated 7 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Report on the delivery of humanitarian aid to Duma on 5 March 2018

On 5 March, international organizations and agencies, with the support of the United Nations, delivered humanitarian aid to Duma (eastern Ghutah), including medicines and medical equipment (45 trucks and one mobile clinic — ambulance with resuscitation equipment).

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides, in cooperation with the Syrian Government, provided comprehensive support for the operation. In particular, the humanitarian corridor was established, the security of the passage was ensured and the deconfliction regime and monitoring of the situation were organized. The Syrian authorities issued appropriate permits and actively participated in the preparation of the operation.

The convoy set off from the United Nations warehouse in Damascus at 9 a.m.

Representatives of international organizations arrived at the Wafidin Camp humanitarian corridor with a delay of more than an hour.

From the outset, there were attempts to include in the convoy medicines and medical equipment designated for other areas in eastern Ghutah, which was in contradiction with the agreement reached earlier with the Syrian Government.

Finally, aid amounting to 58,000 prescriptions (which corresponds to the real needs: the World Health Organization was planning to send approximately 60,000) was delivered. Despite that fact, some humanitarian workers claimed that "practically all the medicines and medical equipment had been withdrawn by the authorities", a claim that was later replicated by Western media.

As the convoy entered Duma, the accompanying staff initiated a communication campaign with leaders of local councils at one of the mosques. This lasted for more than two hours. Owing to that delay, the delivery of humanitarian aid and medicines to civilians was about to fail.

Representatives of humanitarian agencies in both Damascus and Geneva, under the pretext of the lack of time, demanded that Russia extend a humanitarian pause — at first, for two hours and then "indefinitely". The situation was presented as if only Russia and Damascus were responsible for the safety of the entire humanitarian operation.

At 5 p.m., a single mortar shell launched from Jabhat al-Nusra's positions (the eastern edge of Mudayra from across the Ayn-Arbash spring-well, as identified by intelligence) hit the area near the offloading convoy.

Representatives of the humanitarian agencies immediately blamed the Government for the shelling, calling it an air strike. At the above-mentioned period of time, there were no aircraft flying over Duma. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs circulated information that an air bomb exploded 300 m away from the convoy and allegedly caused casualties. The inspection revealed that there was neither video nor photo evidence of an alleged strike or of any wounded.

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides warned that delaying action beyond the agreed time frame could create conditions for provocations by terrorists.

During the operation, all could witness that militants were holding civilians by force as human shields. Civilians were begging the convoy's personnel to facilitate

their escape from the zone, saying that jihadists took the aid and prohibited them from leaving their homes.

On its way back, the humanitarian convoy took 13 civilians, including 5 children, out of the zone.

In the course of the mission, false reports kept coming about alleged attacks by the Syrian Army and the convoy personnel being taken hostage.

Officials of the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides uninterruptedly monitored the passage of the convoy. Representatives of the Russian military police were present at the Wafidin Camp checkpoint. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were used in real time, including at night, which facilitated uninterrupted control along the convoy's route and at the site of unloading.